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2004

MICHIGAN



Weather for Gaylord  
Mostly Cloudy  
Time: 4:30 pm  
Temp: 38 F  
RealFeel Temp: 37 F  
Humidity: 85 %  
Winds: N at 4.6 mph

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# GAYLORD HERALD Times

*A view from the 45th Parallel*

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### ALL IN THE FAMILY: Grandmother adopts her 12-year-old grandson during Adoption Day ceremony

By Michael Jones

Staff Writer

GAYLORD - It's not often someone goes from being called grandma to mom - by the same person - and it's not often a 12-year-old boy can go from being called grandson to son - by the same person.

But with the stroke of a pen by Judge Michael Cooper Tuesday morning, Barbara Damer and her grandson Richard Barnes officially became mother and son - completing the adoption process on Michigan Adoption Day in 87th District Court.

Damer and Richard were one of two families in court completing their adoptions Tuesday, a time for both families to celebrate. "This is one of those rare times when something happy and good takes place in our courtroom," said Cooper. "It's a time to celebrate and honor those families who choose adoption and I get to be a part of it."

Damer made the decision to adopt her grandson once her daughter's parental rights had been terminated while Richard was living in Tennessee almost four years ago.

He grew up with his family in Gaylord and Damer was the typical doting grandmother. "When Richard was born I was committed to him right from the start. I'll admit, I did spoil him," laughed Damer, sitting across the dining room table from her son/grandson

the evening before Thanksgiving.

"I guess we do have a lot to be thankful for," continued Damer. "Richard worried right up until it became official yesterday that he might go back to foster care while we were waiting for the adoption to go through."

Damer said Richard returned to Michigan from Tennessee with a number of trust issues stemming from his difficult family life and then living in foster care for a year-and-a-half prior to coming to live with Damer. "At first I didn't know if they were going to let him go with me when he got off the plane in Traverse City," recalled Damer of their first meeting in several years.

It had been a while since Richard had seen his grandmother. On his 2002 arrival in Michigan on his 10th birthday, Richard wasn't quite sure about

anything. "When I first saw her I looked at her and said, 'You're not my grandma,'" recalled Richard with an impish grin, followed by a laugh. "I'm still not sure she's my grandma," he said, teasing her.

The past two years have been a period of adjustment for the two as they awaited official word of the adoption. "For the first two or three months I didn't know if it was going to work," said Damer. "He was angry a lot - with me, at school. He didn't want to do anything or talk to anyone, but as time went on it got better and better," she said, noting Richard was having a good academic year in sixth grade after a rocky start at the Gaylord Intermediate School two years ago.

"I've got someone to spoil and Richard feels a lot safer now," said Damer.

"I kept hearing over and over it (adoption) was going to happen and I was a bit overwhelmed when we went into the courtroom on Tuesday," said Richard. "Everyone in school knew about it. I just couldn't keep it in - I told everybody. I feel a lot better about now being adopted. It really did happen."

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